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The February Lull in sport - Sports Gambling

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
March 4, 1992

Late February and early March on the sport's scene is a time between, and a time of anticipation. This is especially true if you live in the cold climates, where by this time of year cabin fever has set in, the Super Bowl is over, and the sports in season are biding their time.

Hockey and college basketball are coming to the end of their regular season. The losers are demoralized and the winners are tuning up for the playoffs. The second season in hockey, and March Madness, as it is now called, are still ahead for the hardcourt and puck faithful. In professional basketball the dog days have arrived, and the contenders are about to be permanently separated from the pretenders.

I can remember those cold late February and early March days in Minnesota, with only occasional relief coming when the mercury broke the four-zero mark, and there was melting and mud everywhere. A certain sports malaise would set in, which matched the weariness with winter. And indeed the malaise has set in here too, as spring break approaches.

Some marketing genius at Sports Illustrated recognized this phenomenon and set out to capitalize, with the now nearly legendary swim suit issue. There were no big sports stories to cover, the sports fan was in a funk. Why not provide some relief! It was an instant smash hit, this bit of soft-core porn in mid-winter, and it has spawned several imitators.

This year the whole pattern has been delayed by the winter Olympics. The post-Super Bowl lull was avoided, and at Sports Illustrated the traditional swim suit issue was delayed. It is due to arrive this week, although probably a bit late as my postman will get first dibs. How easily a nation with a short history accepts something as "a tradition."

Despite the malaise there are stories out there worthy of comment. The Boys of Summer have arrived in Florida and Arizona and the talk of contracts, negotiations, and holdouts is in the air. I was driving past a Little League practice the other day and thought that perhaps I should stop, see if I could spot some eight year old talent, sign them up, make demands on their coaches, and wait patiently for ten years to collect my ten percent of multiple-millions. It was only a passing whim, like

the lottery. But Ryne Sandberg was once a Little Leaguer. What is ten percent of 7.1 million?

In Tallahassee while the State of Florida watches its education, prison, and social service systems wither and die from lack of funds and lack of leadership, the legislature is busy dealing with sports gambling. Should gambling on the major professional sports be legalized? Why not? Well, because, if there is gambling on these sports they will be corrupted. The odds of fixing the games will increase.

Really! I thought there already was gambling on all the major sports. In fact, the more major the sport, the greater the volume of gambling. Is legalized gambling more dangerous than illegal gambling?

And what of the sports in Florida that do have legalized gambling; Jai-lai, dog-racing, horse-racing. Have these sports already been corrupted? Are these sports, operating under the watchful eye of the State, already fixed? If so why has nothing been done? If not, then what of the argument that legalized gambling will corrupt sport? The smoke pouring out of Tallahassee on this issue is suffocating. I'll give you 6-1 that this bill doesn't make it out of committee.

Meanwhile there is a story worth watching closely, brewing in Las Vegas, at the Harvard of the Desert, the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Jerry Tarkanian, the Father Flanagan of College Athletics, who took the Running Rebs to the national championship in College Basketball, and took the University to national championship levels in NCAA rules violations, has announced that he is rescinding his resignation.

This development came as a surprise to University President Robert Maxon, who thought he was finally rid of the Shark, and could continue to try to build the academic reputation of his institution. As the week has progressed President Maxon has assured the world that Tark is History at UNLV, that a resignation is a resignation. Both Maxon and Tarkanian have accused each another of lying, underhanded politics, and corruption. The boosters have organized to bring pressure on the University and the Board of Governors, while seeking to persuade large donors to withhold their contributions unless Tarkanian is kept on, and Maxon is forced to resign.

This university president has made a fatal error. He has challenged the most popular man in Las Vegas, and one of the

most powerful people on campus, a successful coach, a bringer of national championships. Other presidents have made this mistake. President Atchley tried to bring his athletic program at Clemson under control, and it cost him his job. He now presides over a more modest program at the University of the Pacific. At Michigan State the president tried to tell the football coach that he couldn't be both coach and athletic director. The coach thought otherwise, and the president was made to see the light.

Robert Maxon may win the immediate struggle with Jerry Tarkanian, but he will not win the war. That Robert Maxon will soon be out of a job is what they call in Vegas, "The Lock of the Year."

Hey Mr. Postman, bring me my Sports Illustrated.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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